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Elizabeth Alexander Reading at the American Literature Association Conference

—Andrea Harris

The work of poet and professor Elizabeth Alexander, the inaugural poet chosen by President Obama, ranges far beyond that powerful poem she read in January 2009 on the steps of the Capitol. Alexander is Chair of African American Studies at Yale University, as well as the author of five books of poetry, two books of criticism, and various other works. When I watched her read her powerful poem—"Praise Song for the Day"—on that incredible day,

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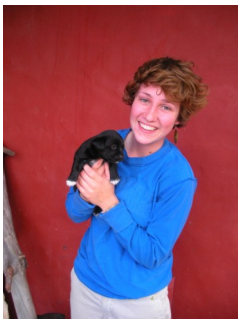
¡Como Uruguay, no hay!

(There is no country like Uruguay!)

—Erica Martin
– Uruguay, Spring 2009

As I stepped into Straughn Auditorium on August 21st my heart lifted and sighed simultaneously. For flying high in the top left corner of the stage was the Uruguayan flag, my flag. And even as memories of my adventures and friends flooded my mind I was happy to be back, to have returned to Mansfield after a semester away. As I sat among the hordes of freshman listening to Dr. Rashidi's Convocation address, my mind was bobbing to the sounds of cumbia, sipping mate, and strolling along La Rambla in Montevideo.

My thoughts drifted to the weekend in Cabo Polonio. Tucked in under a blanket of stars set free by a town with no electricity and zero light pollution, I slept atop a boulder and was lulled to sleep by the sound of the crashing waves and the barks of sea lions. I remember being awakened the next morning, minutes before sunrise, by a large stray puppy. And by puppy I mean puppy by age, not by size, for he was deserving of the name I gave him, Osito (bear). Osito made himself at home next to my sleeping bag. Seemingly content to have found a friend, he watched the sunrise with me. That large, almost waist tall puppy was my friend and faithful companion from when he woke me up at sunrise until I left the quiet fishing town later that weekend. He followed my every step. Osito led the way as my friends and I explored the dunes, bought groceries, took naps on the beach, and he even waited beside my chair as we ate on a restaurant's patio.



Erica pup in hand

This surprising canine loyalty was not a one-time occurrence during my six months in Uruguay. In fact I was claimed as a friend by a dog or puppy in nearly every town I visited. I cannot count how many adventures were experienced with a stray dog by my side or how many times my friends teased me about having canine boyfriends.

If a country's greatness were to be evaluated according to the friendliness of its canine popu-

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Please, send news, announcements, and contributions to: ksanner@mansfield.edu

What a Liberal Education Tells Us about Ourselves, Slavery, and the Art of Resilience

Highlights from a speech given at the
Mansfield University Fall Convocation
August 28, 2009

—Dr. Linda Stump Rashidi, Professor of Linguistics

I spend my summers reading and doing 'field work.' I'm a linguist, and I find wisdom and inspiration both from books and getting out in the field, living with people in other cultures, people who are different from me, have different attitudes and different ways of engaging the world. Over the years, I have lived in a Berber village at the edge of the Sahara in southern Morocco, set up schools for girls in Afghanistan, taught undergraduates in Jilin, China and graduate students in Sofia, Bulgaria; I worked in an orphanage in Bombay, India, and taught English as a Second Language in Tokyo, Japan. In all of these places, from all of these people, I have seen amazing ways in which ordinary people not only cope but create and thrive under the most difficult of circumstances.

Lessons, models, of resilience are everywhere; and

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Bob Timko, Professor of Philosophy and Linda Rashidi, Professor of Linguistics prepare for Convocation 2009

Revolutionary Heroines

--Dr. Fanny Arango-Keeth

On August 19th, 20th , and 21st, 2009, intellectuals and scholars from around the world gathered to discuss the participation of women in the advancement of Latin American independence at the symposium "Women in the Independence of Latin America" held in Lima, Peru. Dr. Sara Beatriz Guardia, founder and director of the Centro la Mujer en la Historia de América Latina, organized this event with the help of UNESCO, the Convenio Andres Bello, and the Universidad San Martín de Porras.

Until recently, the presence of women in this period of history has been perceived as anecdotic and/or invisible. The aim of this conference was to help reclaim their fight for independence by revealing new archival research and interpreting literary and non-literary texts written by women during this period.

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Spanish, Science, and Central America

—Carissa Ganong

Graduating from Mansfield in 2006 with a double major in biology and Spanish might seem like an odd combination; but, as a teenager reading about Central American rainforests, I decided I wanted to be a tropical ecologist and started studying biology and Spanish with the goal of doing fieldwork in Latin America. In my senior year at MU, I was offered an REU through Duke University's Organization for Tropical Studies (OTS) and spent ten amazing weeks in Costa Rica surveying habitat for cavity-nesting birds in primary rainforest. Fluency in Spanish was an important factor in both my acceptance to the program and my ability to work effectively with Costa Ricans.

Six months ago, I accepted a position in the ecology Ph.D. program at the University of Georgia. My advisor, a prominent tropical aquatic ecologist, was impressed with the fact that I could speak Spanish and promptly offered me a two-week position (all expenses paid) as translator and field assistant. A senior grad student needed my help collecting aquatic insects in Panama. As a direct consequence of my Spanish major, I was able to spend two incredible weeks in remote montane rainforest, collecting insects and learning more about tropical nature and Latin American culture.

Spanish will continue to be a strong asset to my research: I've been accepted to an eight-week OTS tropical biology course in Costa Rica in spring 2010, and my dissertation research will probably be focused in Central America.

Ten years ago, I could not have predicted that the language I enjoyed learning would open so many doors to a future career in science.

Alumni News:

Hannah Killian was accepted into the MLS program at Clarion and began her studies in June.

Katie Kingsley, BSE '09 is teaching 9th and 12th grade English in the Towanda Area School District.

Ed Kozaczka, BSE '07 will present "'...she learned romance as she grew older--the natural sequence of an unnatural beginning': Queer Temporality, Spatiality, and Memory in Jane Austen's *Persuasion*" at the NEASECS Conference in November and the essay "Coetzee, Cixous, and Mr. and Mrs. Cruso: A Postmodern Revision of *Robinson Crusoe*" at the Defoe Society Conference in September.

Mary Nance, BSE '08 is teaching 7th grade English in the Wellsboro School District.

Michele Reed is teaching 9th and 10th grade English at North Dorchester High School in Maryland.

Amanda Shumway is teaching 8th, 10th and 12th grade English at Sayre Jr./Senior High School.

Faculty News:

Congratulations to **Dr. Brad Holtman** and **Prof. Louise Sullivan-Blum,** who were promoted to Full Professors and to **Dr. Kristin Sanner,** who was promoted to Associate Professor.

As a result of her recent research related to 19th Century Latin American women writers, **Dr. Fanny Arango-Keeth** has been appointed as a member of the *Bicentennial Commission: Women in the Independence of Latin American* sponsored by UNESCO. Her role will be to revise the role of women in the consolidation of independence in the Latin American countries.

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Carissa Ganong, MU Spanish alumna in Panama

Jamie Sweitzer is teaching English at Dallastown.

Amanda Tyler, BSE '09 is teaching 7th, 8th and 10th grade English at Northern Potter School District. She writes that "I spent six months doing day-to-day subbing for Troy and Southern Tioga. In March, I took a short term, three month position at Blossburg. It was a great experience and I loved it there. In May, I interviewed for a position at Northern Potter and was offered the job two days after my interview. Since then, I moved to Ulysses and am now teaching. I teach three sections of English 7, three sections of English 8, including a section of inclusion, and one section of 10th grade Expository Writing. I have one of the busiest schedules at the school, as most teachers have six classes and a study hall (in some cases five classes and two study halls). I would rather be teaching than keeping track of a study hall anyway. I love being busy! So far, I love almost everything about my new job. The one thing I miss is not having technology. I teach with an overhead and transparencies. That's a far cry from teaching with a Polyvision Board and a MacBook lab! If I stay with Northern Potter, I have been promised that in a few years they will get me whatever technology I can justify using."

Elizabeth Alexander Reading

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I did not know her work but I was very moved.

Her presence was contained but powerful as she captured aspects of the miraculous journey that brought America to its first African American president. The poem also distilled the feeling so many had of hope and promise—"I know there's something better down the road/…In today's sharp sparkle/…any thing can be made, any sentence begun." Her reading was also noteworthy in and of itself, as Alexander is only the fourth inaugural poet in presidential history. It was a great public relations moment for poetry, I thought—an accessible poem read to millions in person and on television on an unforgettable day.

This spring, at the *American Literature Association Conference* in Boston, I had the great luck to hear Alexander read "Praise Song for the Day" and other poems in person. Although she is now a celebrity of sorts, Alexander spoke of feeling most at home among colleagues and students at this conference. Alexander's poetry ranges over many subjects: American history, African American history, images of women, everyday life and so on. Her poetry is accessible yet complex, down to earth yet sublime, as in her collection entitled "American Sublime." As she spoke to the audience between readings of her poems, her passion and commitment to teaching was very clear. Among other issues central to her is the need for more critical attention to the work of young African American poets. Like many before her, such as Alice Walker who spearheaded the revival of Zora Neale Hurston's work, she is a caretaker of her own literary tradition as well as ours.

Elizabeth Alexander's reading that day in Boston of "Praise Song for the Day" had an immense impact on her audience. As someone who tears up easily, I thought, "Here we go," as she began the poem—"Each day we go about our business,/ walking past each other, catching each other's/ eyes or not, about to speak or speaking…". I was relieved to see around me scores of people in a similar state as Alexander described each of us in

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Sigma Tau Delta News

Members of MU Xi, the Mansfield Chapter of the International English Honor Society, Sigma Tau Delta, traveled to Towanda with Dr. Edward Washington's Shakespeare students for a stage performance of Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* in October and then to Ithaca for a performance of *Romeo and Juliet* in November. This semester a record number of new members joined our local chapter, including: Zhen Cai, Megan Croft, Wes Cromley, Heather Gostinski, Kerri Grewe, Danielle Muller, Marissa Scott, Steven Smith and Di Yang.

For information about the organization, contact one of the faculty advisors, Dr. Kristin Sanner (ksanner@mansfield.edu), Dr. Jimmy Guignard (jguignar@mansfield.edu), or Dr. John Ulrich (julrich@mansfield.edu).

What a Liberal Education Tells Us

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even though you and I are blessed to be here at MU in a thriving community of learners and thinkers, when challenges arise—and they will—it is good to have before us for inspiration the examples of others: the examples of non-literate Berber women, of Chinese students learning English in a far corner of China, of a fictional boy faced with his own fate on the high seas, of a real-life linguist living in a perplexingly unfamiliar culture, and of a 7-year-old Sudanese boy captured and enslaved by his own countrymen.

For three summers, I lived at the edge of the Sahara Desert in a small village populated exclusively by women, most of whom were not literate. They cultivated the fields, herded their sheep and goats, and harvested almonds and olives—and had a rich cultural life of music, dancing, and oral narrative. My job was to learn their language, Berber, but what I really learned from these women was a tenacity for learning. In my final summer with them, a young school teacher came once a week to teach adult literacy classes. For two hours, these women sat in the one-room schoolhouse, where during the year young boys took their lessons, and focused their entire energies on learning to read and write in Arabic (not their native language). They did not leave their lessons at the schoolhouse door, however, but doggedly practiced at every opportunity. During the day, temperatures would soar to over 100 degrees, but as evening came on, the air would cool off and, as it did, the women would gather outside to gossip and wait for night to fall, their time to bring out their drums and dance and sing. As they cooled off, they challenged each other—and me!—by drawing letters in the dust with sticks or quizzing each other on the latest multiplication or division problems. I discovered I could not escape their incessant thirst to master these skills.

They scraped the same letters in the dust in the early mornings as they waited for their bread to bake in the communal oven or for their turn to draw water from the village well. I had no choice but to really practice my Arabic writing. These women were not afraid to make mistakes or look foolish. But the greatest lesson I have learned from them is their utter joy in learning for learning's sake. These are enormously busy women, and they did not really need ▲ ► to pursue Arabic literacy—but they did.

I found this same thirst for knowledge and learning from my Chinese students during the year I spent teaching in Jilin, China. Jilin is not Beijing or one of the modern cities of the south, but a relatively provincial town, and my students had little opportunity to practice their English. I was, in fact, the only native speaker at the university where I taught, and practically the only native speaker in the entire city. I soon discovered—to my dismay, I have to admit—that every word I uttered was taken as a pure example of how English is spoken, and they quizzed me endlessly about minor points of grammar and usage: "Why do you say 'if I were happy' but 'I was happy'? Why don't you pronounce the 't' in 'butter'?" They were always, every minute of every day, totally engaged in the act of learning...

But they are really just ordinary people like you and me who, when faced with an extraordinary situation, tapped into their deepest reserves. They found resilience by conquering their fears, by being alert to danger, by observing the natives, and by taking charge of their own lives. They took a chance, and sometimes they failed at first, but they didn't let that stop them from trying again. And perhaps most importantly, they believed in themselves and tackled whatever was at hand with energy and enthusiasm. They found inner strength.

Elizabeth Alexander Reading

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our ordinary, work-a-day lives. As I reread the poem today, I gravitate toward these lines that talk about what it means to write--the power of words themselves: "A teacher says, *Take out your pencils. Begin*./ We encounter each other in words, words/ spiny or smooth, whispered or declaimed,/ words to consider, reconsider." If we look at these lines in tandem with those quoted above about hope for a bright future, Alexander seems to be telling us that our futures do indeed depend on how we encounter each other, and this is something that takes place in language. Her words remind me that this is why I read, write, and teach--because we know ourselves and each other only through the medium of language.

Faculty News (cont.)

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Dr. Andrea Harris's article "The Third Sex: Figures of Inversion in Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood*" has been published in the series *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* Vol. 212 (Gale), edited by Thomas J. Schoenberg and Lawrence J. Trudea. The essay is a reprint of the article, which first appeared in *GENDERS* 20 in 1994, and was solicited for the Djuna Barnes volume of the series. In March 2009, Dr. Harris presented the paper "Everday Activism: Writing about Local Food in the Composition Classroom" at the *College English Association Conference* at the University of Pittsburgh.

Dr. William Keeth received a FPDC research grant that enabled him to compile and study Peruvian poetry written by the Generation of 1950.

Dr. Tom Murphy's essay "The Clearing" appeared in the Spring 2009 issue of *Amoskeag: The Journal of Southern New Hampshire University.*

Dr. Linda Rashidi's essay "Translation of a Wild Tale," co-authored with Christo Stamenov has been published in LACUS Forum 34: Speech and Beyond. Ed. by Patricia Sutcliffe, et. al., 2008.

Dr. Kristin Sanner presented her paper "Production & the Black Market: Cannibalism & Capitalism in Chesnutt's

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Revolutionary Heroines

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Thanks to a student-faculty research travel grant, Tasha Buffington (a Spanish graduate and the Outstanding Senior of Mansfield University 2009) and I were able to share our paper "The Inscription of *Matria*: Gender Discourse, Social Memory and Identity of the Heroine as an Allegory of the Construction of the Nation" at this event.

Our analysis of three literary pieces (the dramas *Maria de Vellido* (1882) by Carolina Freyre de Jaimes, *Hima-Sumac* (1892) by Clorinda Matto de Turner and the narrative *La princesa Suma-Tica* by Zoila Aurora Cáceres (1929)) joined an extraordinary exchange of ideas that sought to revise the patriarchal and official history of Latin America from the 16th to the 19th century.

At the conference Tasha and I listened to a completely different version of Latin America's Independence, one which included heroines such as Micaela Bastidas (Peru, 1745-1781), María Parado de Bellido (Peru, 1761-1822), Juana Asarduy (Bolivia, 1780-1862), Francisca Zubiaga de Gamarra (Peru, 1803-1835), Xaviera Carrera (Chile, 1781-1862), Manuela Sanz (Ecuador, 1795-1856) among others.

This conference, however, represented only one of the last legs of our academic journey. We also presented a paper at the Seminar: 19th Century Latin American Women Writers that was held on August 24 and 25 at the Raúl Porras Barreneachea Institute from Universidad Nacional Mayor de San Marcos. In this seminar, scholars analyzed the literary and paraliterary works of 19th Century Latin American women writers, in particular the non-canonic pieces, diaries, letters, and travel narratives.

Our paper, "Autobiographical and Historical Subject: Clorinda Matto de Turner's Letters to Ricardo Palma (1884-1908)", analyzes Matto de Turner's positionality and identity. Matto de Turner was a 19th century Peruvian novelist, essayist, journalist, editor, teacher, civil rights activist and feminist. Her most recognized work is the first indigenous novel of Spanish America, *Aves sin nido* (1889). In this novel, she denounces the exploitation of the indigenous population in 19th Century Peru.

While this past summer's conference ended with new findings and new perspectives about the revolutionary roles and works of Latin American women activists, feminists, journalists, and writers, what seems almost more important was the academic journey itself.

Participating in these two conferences would have been impossible without the three prior academic semesters of joint research—research that was dependent upon student-faculty research grants. This type of institutional support was just as vital and crucial to our academic journey as our participation in the events themselves.

It is more than disappointing to see that our administration has stopped supporting faculty and student-faculty research at Mansfield University. This action accompanied by the recent French and German program closures seems disgraceful, especially in light of new building construction and the creation of degree programs like ROTC.

Micaela Bastidas 1745-1781

In a sense, we live in an academic community where the administrators are consistently degrading content based instruction and the principles of a Liberal Arts education. Research, which is the core mission of ANY university, is now being neglected and overlooked at Mansfield University.

As in the case of these 19th Century women writers, it may be the time for students and faculty members to reclaim their academic space.

Faculty News (cont.)

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'Dave's Neckliss' & 'The Goophered Grapevine'" at the American Literature Association conference in Boston this past May.

Dr. Judith Sornberger's poem "Fear and Loathing at West's Café, Route 15," appeared in the Summer 2009 issue of *The Cimarron Review.*

Prof. Louise Sullivan-Blum's essay "You Can Take Me to the Shrine, but You Can't Make Me Pray," is now out in *Something to Declare: Good Lesbian Travel Writing,* edited by Gillian Kendall from Terrace Books (an imprint of the University of Wisconsin Press).

Dr. Ed Washington presented his paper "Liberating Blackness in Two Literary Texts" at the *National Association of African American Studies* in Baton Rouge, LA last February, chaired and moderated the session entitled "Issues of Language and Liberation" at the College Language Association Conference in Cambridge, MD last March and served as a review board member and reviewer for the journal *Making Connections: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Cultural Diversity. Elmira Star-Gazette* journalist Jeff Murray wrote a feature article on Dr. Washington's new "Introduction to African American Studies" course, AAS 1100 in conjunction with his Black History Month series.

¡Como Uruguay, no hay!

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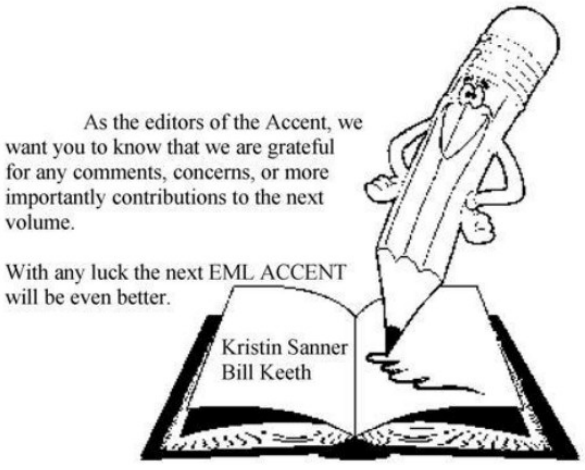
lation, Uruguay would be in the top five. Trust me. And although it was entertaining to have canine friends everywhere I went, they are a pocket-sized part of my study abroad experience. It seems impossible to express through a paragraph the impact of this experience. I studied and lived a language. I met a million new people. I traveled extensively and lived cheaply. I talked with people and shared ideas. I enjoyed amazing food and drink.

I was challenged and I challenged others. I acquired a new home and a new set of grandparents. I thought outside of the box. I lived life Uruguayan style.

In reference to my semester in Uruguay: if I could pick it up, wrap my arms around it, kiss it on the forehead and tell it I love it for all its faults, I would.


As the editors of the Accent, we want you to know that we are grateful for any comments, concerns, or more importantly contributions to the next volume.
With any luck the next EML ACCENT will be even better.
Kristin Sanner
Bill Keeth